

Effective Public Communication and Marketing of High-Occupancy-Vehicle Lanes

An Agency Perspective

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The Massachusetts Highway Department (MassHighway) opened the Southeast Expressway high-occupancy-vehicle (HOV) lane on November 15, 1995. The 6-mi (9.6-km) contraflow lane, open to vehicles with at least three occupants, was MassHighway's third attempt to create an HOV facility on the Southeast Expressway. Two previous HOV lanes, built in the 1970s, had closed because of operational problems and public opposition. Supported by FHWA, MassHighway developed a \$558,000 marketing program to promote the new HOV facility and encourage its use by commuters. The difficulties in developing an HOV facility on the congested highway were mirrored in the marketing challenge faced by its agency managers. From the first 8 months of the campaign, MassHighway has learned several important lessons from the experience. Marketing should begin years before the project opens. The feasibility analysis offers agencies the opportunity to solicit community input and identify marketing themes for the later campaign. Agencies should allot at least 6 months to prepare for the marketing campaign. They should strongly consider the use of professional consultants in marketing, public relations, and advertising. The bulk of the marketing budget should be spent within the facility's opening weeks. Agencies should assign their own staff, not outside consultants, to act as project spokespersons. Messages should be tailored to specific audiences identified in the campaign. Public perception of the facility will depend in large part on how well it is operated. Fair and uniform enforcement promotes the facility and maintains public acceptance. HOV-facility managers must be prepared to convert unforeseen incidents into positive press coverage. Reporting on lane conditions must be scrupulously accurate, because there likely will be intense public scrutiny of agency statements. MassHighway's HOV-lane marketing program, ultimately successful, may be instructive to other states contemplating similar initiatives.

The Massachusetts Highway Department (MassHighway) opened the Southeast Expressway high-occupancy-vehicle (HOV) lane on November 15, 1995. The 6-mile (9.6-km) contraflow lane, featuring a movable barrier system, was developed over 3 years and represented a \$30 million state commitment (Figure 1). The lane operates under a three-person entry rule during peak periods.

The deployment of a new HOV lane on the Southeast Expressway created a significant marketing challenge for MassHighway. The agency had twice attempted to operate HOV facilities on the same roadway, in 1971 and 1977. Both projects failed, with the more recent closing coming in the face of intense public opposition after just 12 days of enforced operation. Institutional and public memories of the two failed attempts in many ways shaped the marketing and public communication for the new HOV lane.

The highway itself made the development of an HOV facility in 1995 a complex and difficult task. The Southeast Expressway,

designed to carry 75,000 vehicles a day, now carries 190,000 vehicles a day, making it the second-most-traveled highway—and certainly one of the most congested—in New England. Marketing the facility was to require overcoming a great deal of public skepticism about the state's ability to have any effect on the overburdened roadway.

The HOV marketing program, supported by state and federal funds and created by a team of agency and marketing professionals, resulted in a positive public perception of the facility throughout its critical opening weeks.

The marketing and promotion of HOV facilities is a fairly new task for transportation agencies. Long accustomed to general public support for their mission, most agencies have relatively little expertise in public relations, advertising, or media management. The Massachusetts HOV marketing effort, conducted between November 1995 and July 1996, provides some insight into the practical realities of public agency-based HOV outreach and public communication.

EARLY MARKETING TECHNIQUES

Identifying Local Issues

An early opportunity to test and solicit public opinion is during the feasibility analysis, when HOV concepts are in the formative stages. The feasibility study, developed among a multidisciplinary group of planners, other agencies, advocacy groups, and community and elected representatives, provides a forum for identifying local concerns, helping to sidestep issues that might otherwise become stumbling blocks in later public outreach efforts.

MassHighway formed an HOV Feasibility Study Oversight Committee in March 1992 for the preliminary identification of local, agency, police, and interest-group concerns before the HOV concept advanced too far to accommodate changes (*1*). The broad-based feasibility study group enabled MassHighway officials to hear from commuters, select a contraflow design, and address local concerns before they became insurmountable problems.

Premarketing Measures

Once the feasibility process is completed, transportation agencies can use the study as a foundation for further premarketing approaches. These can include presentation of the study results to chambers of commerce, neighborhood associations, elected officials, and media

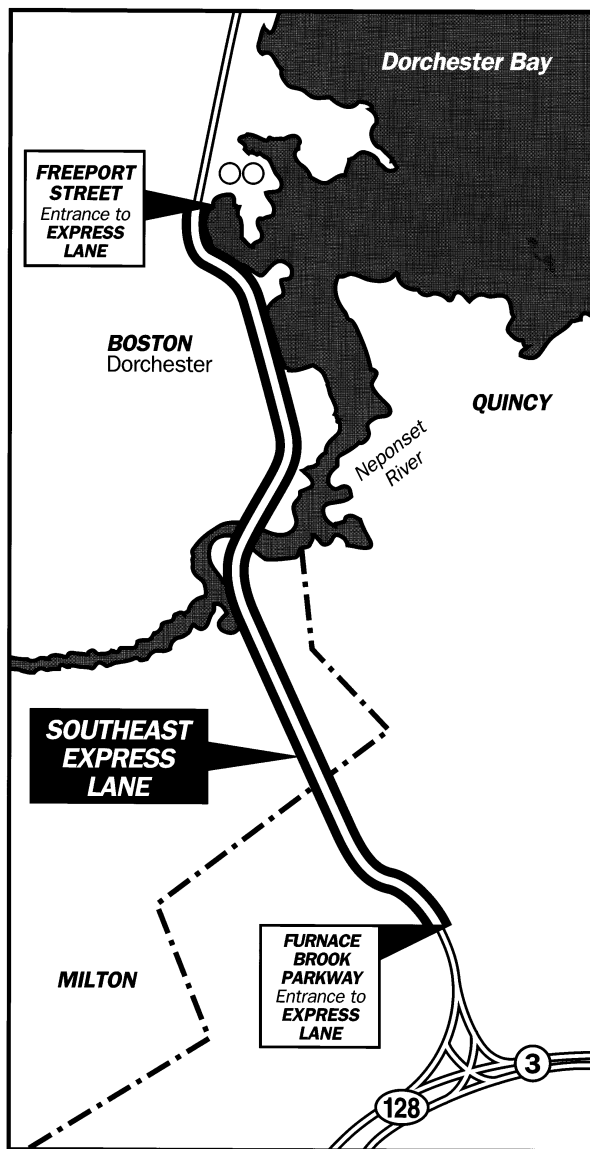


FIGURE 1 Southeast Expressway project limits (design by Providence Creative Group).

representatives. MassHighway developed an early outreach program that involved public meetings, media interviews, and a series of coordinating sessions with other operating agencies to discuss the I-93 Southeast Expressway/Route 3 HOV feasibility study. Resolution of several issues, such as highway runoff into nearby Dorchester Bay, was identified by neighborhood residents as key to their support for the HOV project. Settling these issues enabled MassHighway to advance the project through construction with little public opposition.

The early marketing in the feasibility process also can help agencies develop marketing messages. In presenting feasibility study results to various groups, MassHighway found that commuters were less interested in cost savings than they were in travel-time savings. Non-HOV commuters were concerned that the HOV facility not punish them for driving alone and expressed some skepticism that lane use would be enforced fairly. Many commuters had pointed

reservations about MassHighway's ability to open and close the barrier system in snowy weather.

With this public input, MassHighway produced a marketing plan that emphasized travel-time savings, benefits to all drivers, operational fairness, and reliability. Project staff stressed that the contraflow lane would be borrowed from the underutilized off-peak side of the highway, thereby improving the ride for HOVs and non-HOVs alike. MassHighway also provided extensive project information to transportation reporters of the corridor's major radio and newspaper outlets. These briefings addressed enforcement, operational, and technological issues related to the project. The outreach effort not only incorporated marketing themes identified in the feasibility process but also enabled project staff to polish their message for the later, more intensive marketing program.

During the premarketing phase, agencies should monitor public response to particular features or themes. MassHighway officials noted some early curiosity about the barrier transfer vehicle, the 50-ft (15-m) long truck that would come to define the contraflow approach. Capitalizing on this interest, project officials brought videotapes, photographs, and an artist's renderings of the Zipper Truck (nicknamed locally because it appeared to "zip" the barrier wall open and closed) to public meetings during the feasibility, design, and construction phases. State officials highlighted the unusual trucks as a high-tech solution to previous problems with HOV lanes on the Southeast Expressway.

PREPARING THE CAMPAIGN

Agency and Outside Resources

Marketing is not a natural activity for most transportation agencies, which have long enjoyed widespread public support for their basic road-building and maintenance functions. Agencies with HOV responsibilities, however, must develop new skills in media relations, public communication, and advertising. Project staff acting as spokespersons must be familiar with technical details of the project and able to communicate them in clear and understandable terms. The agency should assign several people to the marketing program, representing operations, public affairs, and project planning. The development of an effective marketing campaign will rely on such an interdisciplinary effort.

Transportation agencies should strongly consider using outside expertise to assist with the HOV marketing campaign. Even with a knowledgeable public affairs staff, most agencies lack the special skills needed to create a multifaceted campaign, including public relations, advertising, and graphics. A relatively small investment in professional expertise can yield large returns in public acceptance and the quality of work. In comparing advertising rates, MassHighway found that its contracted media buyer could negotiate six times as many radio spots as the agency's own staff could secure on its own (2).

Agency staff should be prepared to learn from outside experts and acquire their own skills in media relations. The consultants will be attached to the project for a limited time and should be viewed as a resource for future outreach efforts. Throughout the project deployment, and particularly during the project's critical opening phases, agency staff will be the most credible sources of technical and policy information for the public. Technical knowledge will not be enough to persuade skeptical commuters, however. Agency staff who speak

to the media about the HOV lane must be well-versed in the fundamentals of public communication and in the key messages that the agency wants to deliver.

MassHighway budgeted a day-long media training seminar into its contract with its primary marketing consultant, The Weber Group. The seminar, conducted by Weber's professional public relations staff only 2 weeks before the project opening, consisted of practice interviews, media coaching, and development of key messages. In attendance were several MassHighway staff who likely would serve at various times as project spokespersons. The session proved invaluable to MassHighway staff; all potential spokespersons learned to handle difficult questions, appear before television cameras, and coordinate communication techniques.

Timing of Marketing Contract

Although each agency has its own contracting and bidding procedures for hiring consultants, a few general guidelines warrant attention by HOV marketing staff. First, most states have lengthy and protracted contracting processes, which may be complicated by the unfamiliar task of marketing. Marketing and public relations firms may find rigid public-agency procurement practices to be a bewildering change from the more flexible style to which they are accustomed. Time and constant communication can alleviate the inevitable misunderstandings and prevent lapses during the project's opening phase.

MassHighway began the contracting process nearly 9 months before the Southeast Expressway HOV lane opened. Relying on a marketing plan (which in turn was based on themes developed during the feasibility process), MassHighway issued a Request for Proposals to solicit ideas and work plans from marketing and public relations firms in the greater Boston area. Following a competitive bidding process, MassHighway selected a three-firm joint venture that had submitted a proposal to market the HOV lane. The group was composed of The Weber Group, a public relations firm based in Cambridge, Massachusetts; PriMedia, Inc., a media buying and marketing services firm; and the Providence Creative Group, a marketing and advertising firm. The latter two firms are based in Providence, Rhode Island. The three-firm consortium won the contract because of its broad range of specialties, all of which met the agency's needs. Even with a 9-month head start, MassHighway was only able to award the \$558,000 contract 4 weeks before the opening of the HOV lane.

Hiring Consultants

Agencies should be aware that the marketing campaign itself may become entangled in controversy. MassHighway officials were challenged several times by reporters to justify the use of public highway funds for radio and newspaper advertising for the HOV lane. MassHighway officials responded that a \$30 million project that encouraged commuters to drive on the "wrong" side of an Interstate highway required a vigorous public education effort. Project spokespersons also defused some criticism by pointing to the competitive bidding process that resulted in the selection of the marketing team. By presenting the HOV marketing contract as a responsible public outreach effort that followed normal state contracting procedures, MassHighway avoided controversy about its multimedia campaign.

CAMPAIGN ELEMENTS

Public Relations

Public relations is an appealing element for public agencies with limited marketing budgets. MassHighway's HOV marketing campaign had a public relations element, making up about 20 percent of the overall marketing budget. The public relations plan included the development of a traffic advisory and press relations campaign, the widespread distribution of press information kits, a series of press releases documenting the lane's performance over the first 3 months, outreach to major downtown employers, and ongoing pulse events to remind commuters of the lane's positive features (3).

MassHighway began its public relations campaign for the HOV facility well before it launched the formal marketing phase. HOV project staff began briefing transportation reporters from the three major Boston area newspapers when the project entered its year-long construction phase. As the project opening approached, MassHighway intensified the public relations effort by increasing contact with media outlets and increasing public exposure to the project's more visible features, such as the Zipper Truck.

One week before the lane opened, The Weber Group arranged for project managers to meet with numerous media representatives, including television, radio, and newspaper reporters. MassHighway and Weber staff distributed nearly 200 press kits containing detailed descriptions of the project and its new technology. By now trained in media communication, MassHighway spokespersons stressed the major themes of the campaign, including travel-time savings, operational reliability, and benefits for all drivers.

One day before the HOV lane opened, MassHighway and its marketing consultant invited reporters from four television stations and three newspapers to ride in the Zipper Truck as it conducted practice runs during off-peak periods. The resulting widespread television coverage, as well as the highly visible barrier-moving dress rehearsals on the Southeast Expressway, gave an enormous boost of publicity to the campaign and ensured that few commuters were surprised by the new lane's operation on its inaugural day.

Another technique that proved highly effective was the briefing of reporters from Boston's two major traffic reporting organizations. MassHighway project staff met with reporters in their offices 1 week before the project opened. Both sessions involved lengthy question-and-answer periods, and both resulted in extensive discussion of the new lane on the morning and afternoon broadcasts. Traffic reporters explained entry restrictions and operating rules to commuters, heightening awareness and providing free public information for the marketing campaign.

MassHighway representatives continued to make themselves available for interviews throughout the project's first weeks, emphasizing the major themes of the HOV marketing campaign. Radio outlets gave the HOV lane heavy coverage, perhaps partially spurred by the advertising campaign that focused strongly on drive-time radio spots and public service announcements.

Public relations had an effect on the campaign that was disproportionate to its limited role in the marketing budget. Making up less than 20 percent of the budget, public relations generated well over 80 percent of the press and public attention on the HOV lane after its launch. Also, the project gained credibility when discussed and promoted by traffic reporters, commuters, and local officials.

The drawback to public relations is that the agency has no control over the message, tone, and content of the news stories. Even the

release of straightforward project information can backfire and result in a critical tone in news stories. Advertising, however, gives the opportunity to present a positive, informative, and managed message to the public.

Advertising

MassHighway designed its advertising campaign to acquaint commuters with important project features while promoting the HOV lane as a new, beneficial travel alternative. The agency purchased half-page advertisements at least three times in each of the region's major newspapers in the 2 weeks before the lane opened. The agency's media consultant, PriMedia, purchased an average of 11 spots per day on the region's top eight radio stations for HOV-lane advertisements during the lane's first 4 weeks. The advertisements, designed by the Providence Creative Group, were light in approach but contained key information about operating hours, entry restrictions, and access points.

MassHighway also purchased an illustrated bus advertisement on two commuter buses of Plymouth and Brockton, the corridor's largest private bus carrier. The buses served as rolling billboards while transporting passengers through the corridor during the project's first 6 months of operation. The illustrated bus promoted the HOV lane and the carrier, which saved its passengers up to 30 min of travel time each day by using the lane. Concurrent with its outreach campaign for traffic reporters, MassHighway purchased sponsorships of peak-hour traffic reports during the lane's first month of operation.

MassHighway viewed advertising as an important vehicle to communicate important themes in a positive, managed environment. Advertising also enabled the agency to present complex operational information in a clear, understandable format. Advertising took up the bulk of MassHighway's marketing budget, consuming 70 percent, or nearly \$400,000, of the available funding. Most of this amount was directed toward radio spots and traffic-report sponsorships, all broadcast during drive-time periods.

Recommended Sequence

HOV-lane marketing research generally has concluded that marketing should follow a cycle similar to that of most new products. "HOV marketing," according to the *High Occupancy Vehicle Lane Marketing Manual* (4), "should begin as early as possible in the project planning stages, peak at the time the project opens, and continue over the life of the project." Most marketing studies recommend that the marketing campaign peak around the opening of the new facility.

MassHighway incorporated this advice into its own HOV-lane marketing efforts, beginning the outreach program during the feasibility process, 3 years before the project opened. Once it awarded the marketing contract, MassHighway directed its consultants to arrange a heavy rotation of newspaper and radio advertising, media interviews, and an ongoing series of press releases documenting the lane's performance. MassHighway spent nearly 75 percent of its marketing budget during the lane's first 6 weeks of operation (Figure 2). A later spring and summer radio campaign rounded out the HOV-lane marketing campaign for the Southeast Expressway.

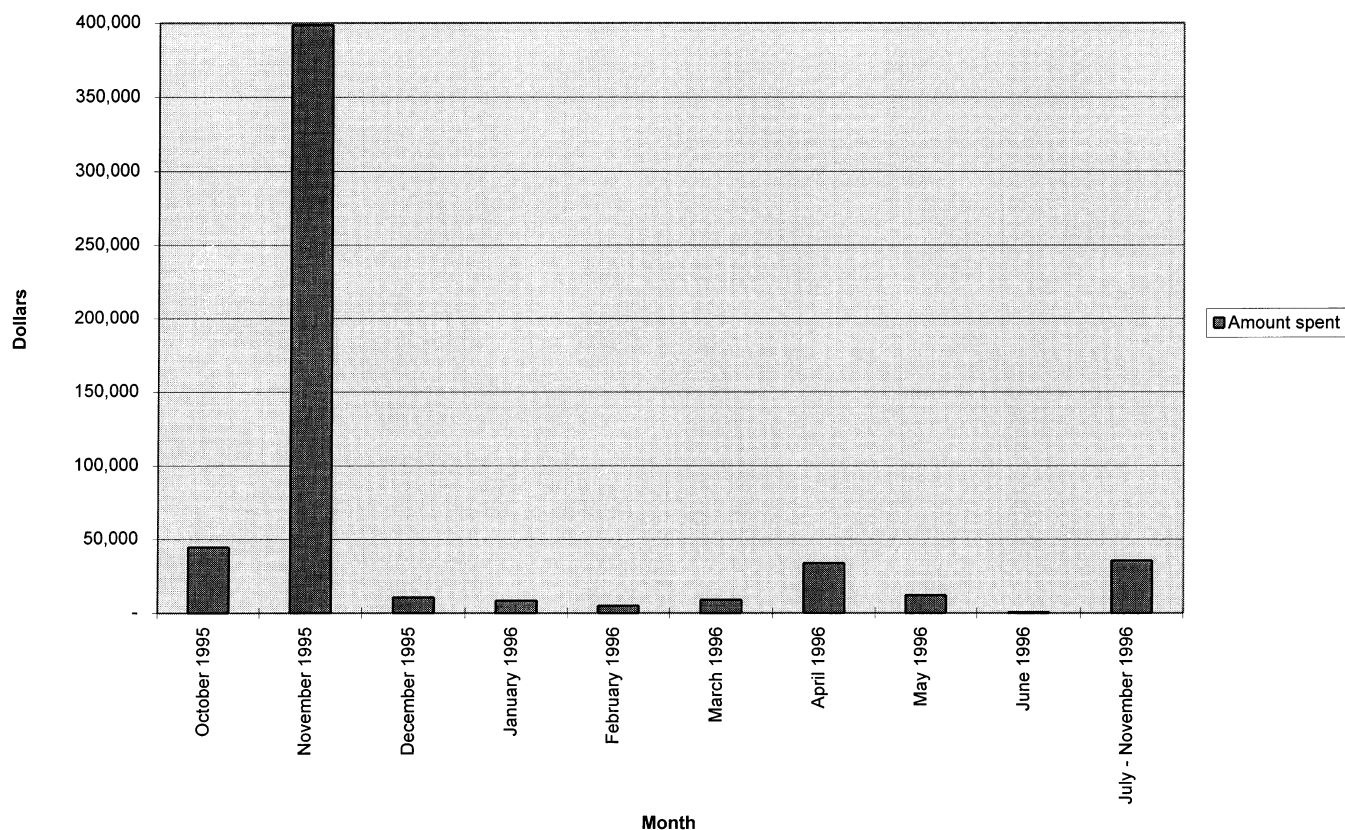


FIGURE 2 Marketing expenditures by month.

THEMES, COMMUNICATORS, AND AUDIENCES

Developing Themes

Commuter response to the marketing campaign generally focused on the lane's performance and MassHighway's ability to operate despite incidents and poor weather. As the campaign developed, project managers began to highlight the lane's intelligent transportation systems technology, which would enable operators to keep the lane open through incidents and snowstorms. The press kit included a section entitled "Technology Facts" to impress on reporters the advantages that would be provided by the lane. Graphical renderings of the barrier system also showcased the technology that would make the lane operate successfully (Figure 3).

Project officials also should be prepared to adapt themes and messages to evolving conditions on the facility. When a succession of severe snowstorms dampened vehicle volumes in the lane during the winter of 1995–1996, MassHighway officials highlighted the lane's operational reliability and travel-time savings, emphasizing the lane's ability to stay open during poor weather. As warmer weather settled in, agency officials launched a new radio advertising campaign aimed at attracting Cape Cod vacation travelers into the HOV lane.

Project Spokespersons

Even with professional public-relations staff under contract, agencies should assign their own staff to act as project spokespersons. Agency employees, especially those who have worked on the project, make more credible spokespersons than hired consultants. In general, a single spokesperson is preferable, as long as the designated person is conversant in the technical and policy aspects of the project.

MassHighway designated the project's manager as the primary spokesperson and the operations manager as a secondary spokesperson. By constantly coordinating on media questions and responses, the two acted as the effective equivalent of a single spokesperson.

Agency executives also became well-versed in the themes and messages of the HOV-lane marketing program so that a cohesive agency response on HOV-lane-related questions became the norm as the project progressed.

Identifying Audience and Message

Once the HOV-lane market has been identified, the marketing campaign should define its primary and secondary targets within the range of commuters in the corridor. The primary market consists of existing and potential (those who are able, but not willing, to share the ride) HOVs. The secondary market is made up of the great majority of drivers—those who drive alone and will not be persuaded to share the ride.

Those who are already eligible to use the lane need very little education on its benefits. They quickly will see for themselves that a designated lane rewards them for ridesharing by decreasing the time of their daily commute. The committed HOV driver is not so much a target as a valuable component of the marketing campaign. HOV-lane marketing staff should line up, or at least be aware of, individual vanpoolers, bus riders, and carpoolers who would be willing to speak to the media about the benefits of the HOV lane, especially during its critical opening phase. The media will have no trouble finding discontented ineligible drivers to complain about the new project. The HOV-lane planner should be sure that a counterpoint, preferably articulated by a beneficiary of the lane, is presented to the press.

MassHighway worked closely with the bus companies and CAR-AVAN for Commuters, Inc., a ridesharing organization that also managed the state's vanpool fleet. When controversy arose over the HOV lane's three-person entry requirement, these companies communicated directly with their customers, who rallied to the requirement's defense. These commuters were particularly effective advocates for the HOV lane. They wrote letters to the editor, contacted their state representatives, and spoke to television, newspaper, and radio outlets about the benefits of the lane. As daily

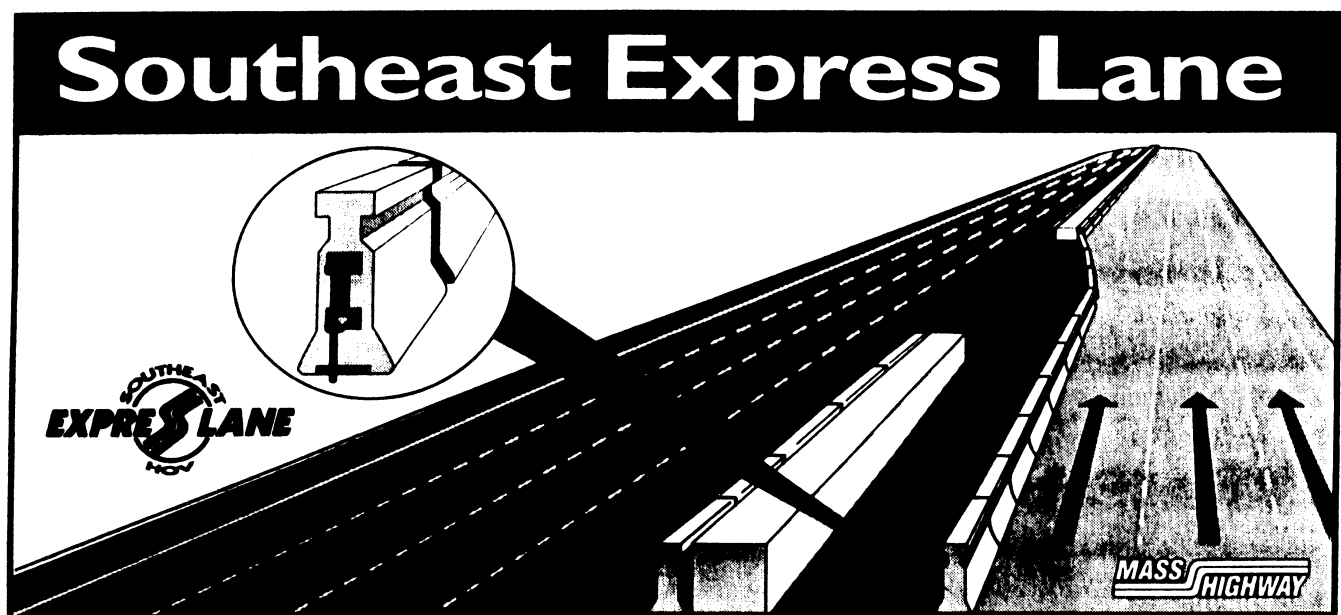


FIGURE 3 MassHighway describes new technology in text and graphics (design by Providence Creative Group).

Southeast Expressway commuters, they spoke with credibility and enthusiasm about the facility, providing a solid foundation for public support.

Those who are potential users should hear about what their commute could be like if they shared the ride. This marketing should bring out their questions and doubts and then respond to them. The marketing must take their concerns seriously, particularly those that deal with operational aspects of the facility. This group needs reassurance that the lane's benefits outweigh its drawbacks and that their concerns have been addressed. MassHighway's marketing messages to members of this group emphasized travel-time and cost benefits and encouraged them to try the lane.

The group whose support will be the most difficult to attain is the committed solo drivers who cannot be persuaded to switch to higher-occupancy modes. Here, marketing messages must respect the sensitivities of those who make up the majority of the peak-period commute. Given that most drivers will, by preference or for other reasons, be ineligible to use HOV lanes, it is unwise to risk crucial public support by appearing to deride the mode of choice for most commuters. MassHighway's campaign stressed the benefits to all drivers (reduced congestion, new choices, and, to some extent, cleaner air) and described the facility as an incentive, not a mandate, to carpool.

MassHighway's advertising campaign was informative and light in its approach, focusing on travel-time savings. One radio spot asked drivers to contemplate the benefits of arriving to work on time by traveling the HOV lane. In the imaginary scene, a boss distributes spontaneous pay raises and serves a sumptuous breakfast to his punctual employees, who presumably have taken the HOV lane to work. Other advertisements focused on the pleasure of traveling 55 mph down the notoriously congested Southeast Expressway during peak hours. The campaign presented the new HOV lane as a choice with benefits for all commuters in the corridor, especially for those who take advantage of the HOV lane.

HOV-LANE OPERATIONS AND PUBLIC OUTREACH

The operation of an HOV facility is easily the project's most visible aspect to the public. Even with intensive, preimplementation marketing, few commuters are likely to pay the project much attention until it opens and they can observe it in action. HOV lanes need significantly more day-to-day attention than do general-purpose lanes, particularly in the areas of enforcement, maintenance, evaluation, and safety. But their singular attribute—the restriction on use—tends to focus public scrutiny on HOV-lane operations in a manner that other transportation projects generally escape. No other aspect of an HOV facility generates as much public response as entry requirements, lane conditions, and enforcement. In this sense, marketing, public education, and HOV-lane operations are related and interdependent aspects of the HOV facility.

Enforcement and Public Perception

Once the lane opens, enforcement of entry requirements is closely monitored by the public. Uneven enforcement quickly erodes public support for the HOV lane. Discontent comes from users and nonusers alike. Legitimate carpools become frustrated with having to share the lane with ineligible drivers, and non-HOVs who abide by the law are dismayed to see unpunished commuters flouting the rules.

Although high-visibility police patrols are perhaps the best marketing technique to assure the public that the HOV lane will operate effectively, other measures supplement and promote this message. MassHighway's marketing pieces, including pamphlets, question-and-answer sheets, statements by project officials, and community presentations, all addressed the issue of enforcement directly and often. The Southeast Expressway HOV lane opened with a heavy presence of police vehicles to underscore the commitment to making the lane work as intended.

The Southeast Expressway HOV lane received a fortuitous infusion of enforcement-related publicity when police caught two would-be violators traveling with crudely fashioned mannequins on the project's third day of operation. The front page newspaper photographs of a smiling state police officer holding up the heads of the human impersonators sent an invaluable message that the state would strictly enforce the new \$30 million facility (Figure 4).

Incidents as Source of Positive Coverage

Agency managers should be prepared fully to shape operational incidents into positive news coverage of the facility. Unforeseen incidents can bring positive attention to the lane, particularly if agency staff are poised to manage the opportunity. Before the lane opened, MassHighway officials had encountered a great deal of public skepticism about its incident management capability in a lane 4.25 m (14 ft) wide. Many expressed concern that a breakdown would snarl the lane instantly, causing congestion in the general-purpose lanes.

A bus with a flat tire in the lane's first week gave MassHighway a chance to respond. The bus was quickly towed, and MassHighway alerted the press within an hour. Subsequent news stories noted that the facility's first incident blocked the lane for less than 2 min. The incident and its management provided an early opportunity to reassure commuters that the HOV facility would be carefully monitored and well-operated.

The HOV operation itself may be a source of favorable press coverage. The winter of 1995–1996, the snowiest in Boston history, descended on the region just 2 weeks after the lane opened. This was MassHighway's worst-case scenario; operations planners had hoped for a mild winter to test the new barrier system. Although more than



FIGURE 4 Enforcement proved to be a major factor in public perception of the HOV lane (photograph courtesy Greg Derr, *Quincy Patriot-Ledger*).

250 cm (100 in.) of snow fell between November and March, the lane stayed open more than 99 percent of its scheduled hours. MassHighway issued a press release in January, noting the lane's on-time record (then 90 percent) and reminding commuters of the reliability they could expect by traveling in the lane. The story, along with many others describing the lane's operational results, was printed in Boston newspapers (5).

Communicating Lane Conditions

Although technical evaluation of the HOV facility's performance can have narrow applications, it also can appeal to the public in certain areas. Marketing can translate this information into an understandable, interesting form that meets the operating agency's public outreach needs. One example of this type of information is travel time. Since a primary incentive offered by HOV lanes is their ability to deliver significant travel-time savings, ongoing outreach can provide commuters with regular reports on how their driving experiences reflect project goals.

The operating agency regularly should provide results of travel-time studies, including comparisons between HOV and general-purpose lanes. This approach generally presents the HOV lane in a favorable marketing position, since the lanes are designed to allow faster commutes than the adjacent general-purpose lanes.

Vehicle volumes in the HOV lane are of significant interest to the media and commuters, particularly during the lane's first month of operation. Most will judge the success of the lane by the number of vehicles in it, so agencies with low-volume HOV lanes should report person counts along with vehicle counts. MassHighway issued several press releases in the HOV lane's opening weeks, documenting a sharp rise in vehicle and person volumes during those weeks.

Marketing efforts must anticipate complaints about underutilization by emphasizing that the HOV lane is carrying as many people as, if not more than, a typical general-purpose lane. Although the person counts provide a legitimate counterpoint to complaints about underutilization, agencies should not expect a great deal of public or media acceptance of this line of reasoning.

The marketing must be honest about the impact on highway and local traffic. Daily commuters have a sophisticated level of knowledge about their particular routes and will react negatively to claims that are not supported by actual conditions. All reports on lane conditions, counts, and time savings should be scrupulously accurate. Agencies should expect intense scrutiny of the lane and its reported impact. In Boston, several media outlets conducted their own HOV-lane counts to make sure that MassHighway was reporting candidly to the public.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

The Southeast Expressway HOV lane is considered an operational success by MassHighway and is generally supported by the public. The three-person requirement generated some complaints about underutilization, but the marketing and public-relations campaigns enabled state officials to respond quickly to critical news stories. A *Boston Herald* poll of its readers found that 73 percent of those responding believed that the HOV lane had improved their commute (6).

Vehicle and person volumes in the HOV lane rose steadily during the period of the HOV-lane marketing campaign. Average

daily vehicle volumes rose 37 percent between November 1995 and July 1996. Average daily person volumes rose nearly 16 percent between November 1995 and July 1996 (7). (These numbers indicate that most of the growth was in three-person carpools.) Although the marketing did not directly contribute to increased HOV volumes, it did create an environment of public and media understanding of the lane's objectives. The widespread public acceptance gave the HOV lane enough time to demonstrate its time savings and reliability, factors that in turn attracted increased ridership during the first 7 months of operation.

HOV-lane marketing should begin early in the planning process. Feasibility analysis offers the first opportunity to solicit public input and develop marketing themes. Premarketing approaches bring the project before a wider audience and identify messages that commuters need to hear. MassHighway's early observation of public interest in the Zipper Truck helped transform a local curiosity into a high-tech symbol of the new HOV facility.

HOV-lane marketing begins well before the project opens. The feasibility study, typically, is conducted years before the HOV lane opens and can provide an early forum for developing messages and themes for the marketing campaign. For the campaign itself, the development themes, identification of local concerns, and contracting with private companies all take at least several months. Although these activities can take place concurrently, marketing work should begin at least 6 months before the project opens.

Transportation agencies should strongly consider using outside expertise to supplement their own marketing resources. Graphic design, advertising, media purchasing, and public-relations techniques all fall outside of the traditional scope of agency activities. A small investment in these resources can yield a more sophisticated and effective campaign. MassHighway's HOV-lane marketing campaign was greatly enhanced by its \$558,000 contract with The Weber Group, PriMedia, Inc., and the Providence Creative Group. Agencies should budget at least 6 months for the hiring and follow normal contracting procedures when selecting the consultant.

Agencies should assign their own project managers to act as spokespersons. This role lends credibility and accountability to the operating agency. MassHighway assigned its project manager as primary spokesperson and its operations manager as secondary spokesperson. The close coordination of their public comments with those of agency executives provided a cohesive agency response to media inquiries.

Agency staff should be prepared to manage unforeseen incidents into positive press stories. Incidents, enforcement issues, and even the weather can be managed into positive stories about the HOV lane. Agency staff must provide accurate operational data and be ready for intense public scrutiny of their statements.

The Massachusetts model provides some insight into the components, structure, and pressures of the HOV-lane marketing campaign. Each state should tailor its own effort to local conditions and expectations. With preparation, full use of agency resources, and good planning, marketing can play an indispensable role in encouraging public acceptance and use of the HOV facility.

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